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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 010324

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TAGS: PREL MARR MOPS PGOV RS

SUBJECT: RUSSIAN COMMUNISTS PROTEST MILITARY COOPERATION
WITH NATO AND U.S.

REF: MOSCOW 10230

Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Political Affairs Alice G. Wells.
Reasons 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (SBU) Russia's Communist Party (KPRF) followed through September 14 on its promise to demonstrate against military cooperation with NATO and the U.S., including the now-postponed Torgau '06 exercise (reftel). According to media reports, demonstrations took place in Moscow, Saratov, Omsk, Yaroslavl, Voronezh, and Tomsk. In some locations, the KPRF was joined by members of the National Bolshevik Party, the Red Youth Vanguard, and several veterans and patriotic organizations, such as the Movement for Army Support and the Union of Soviet Officers.

¶2. (SBU) The demonstration in Moscow, which occurred adjacent to the Embassy, comprised several hundred protesters. Many carried KPRF banners, as well as signs protesting possible U.S. military activity in Russia. Speakers exhorted listeners to reject calls for closer military ties with NATO and the U.S. Some also demanded the resignation of GOR officials responsible for organizing the Torgau exercise. At least 50 paramilitary police were on hand. We observed no disturbances.

¶3. (C) KPRF Deputy Chairman Vladimir Kashin told us afterwards that demonstrations occurred throughout Russia's 88 jurisdictions. He said KPRF leader Gennadiy Zyuganov was in Khabarovsk, where he claimed 2000 people took part. (NOTE: Khabarovsk is the site of the alleged murder of a Russian national earlier this month by a vacationing U.S. soldier, who is now in Russian custody. END NOTE.) Kashin told us the purpose of the protests was to promote the "defense of Russia's borders against NATO and U.S. military incursions." He added that the KPRF would continue its campaign to ensure that no future military exercises occurred on Russian soil.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: While we are skeptical of Kashin's claim that protests occurred in all of the country's jurisdictions, anti-NATO and anti-U.S. military sentiment runs high among Russians, according to recent polls. Such sentiment, especially if accompanied by continuing protests against foreign military activity, would complicate the State Duma's task of ratifying the NATO Status of Forces Agreement if/when it finally reaches the legislature for consideration.

BURNS